



In my opinion the "best" fanac is where your friends are, and it's hard to blame or praise geography for that. Every fan group has its own particular flavor, or several flavors. I could point to the Albany Nyok group, or the Louisville group and indicate things to their disfavor. I could point to the Cincy group or the non-LASFS SoCal group and indicate strengths to their credit. I would never presume to say that Southern California fandom, or Midwestern, or Southern, or whatever, provides the best fanning. It's too damn subjective, too regionalistic to be objective, and totally unproveable except in personal terms (the personal terms of the person making the judgement). As Lan is not speaking imho (in my humble opinion), but rather dogmatically and without qualification, his statement has no credibility. There's nothing wrong with his feeling that way, but he mistakes personal preference for some manner of objective reality. As reality is just an elusive vision, it's wise to not presume that what holds true for you holds true for the world (or fandom...).

Uh, Bill, there's not as much distance as you have in mind between my comment that your NERG article was the best thing you've written and Ted White's comment that it was the worst piece in the issue... I was judging it against what I'd seen of your own fanwriting, and Ted was judging it against the other articles that were published with it. Two different approaches.

Let's noodle on that for a minute. What you've been writing for the last few years is well-suited to publications like *Xenolith*; i.e. personal writings for a personalzine. To transplant that same kind of writing to a genzine has to, in my opinion, result in it being analyzed/critiqued/reviewed on a different level (fancy that: a different level. Do we stand higher or lower?). There is a difference, and to my mind that difference is in the audience that you're aiming for.

I don't suppose, on the surface, that it would make sense to state that any given person is going to think differently about Bill Bowers' fanwriting whether it happens to appear in a genzine or in your personalzine. Fanzines do, however, have different audiences. There's no reason to change content, but there are many good arguments in favor of changing your approach depending on your audience. I think it has something to do with communication and clarity...

If I suddenly got carried away and wrote an 11 page critique of *Energumen 16*, here's what I'd say about your article:

What follows is a nine page article by Bill Bowers. Mike's introductory comment was that it's "esoteric as hell" and "you won't understand it all but" ... Mike is right.

Bill Bowers has never been thought of as a fanwriter. Until fairly recently, that is, when he announced that this is what he'd like to be considered nowadays. Bill can write, and his writing has improved over the years, but his potential as a fanwriter is severely handicapped by his approach. Orwell once stated: "I have not here been considering the literary use of language, but merely language as an instrument for expressing and not for concealing or preventing thought." From his work it would appear that Bill would turn this around to: "I have been considering the literary use of language, but as a vehicle for concealing or preventing and not for expressing thought." Much of what he writes is obscure (not ingroup. Obscure), narcissistic, cutesy poo, and occasionally revealing but in a peek-a-boo manner.

What he has done here is the best thing I've read by him, primarily due to an increased command of the language and a decreased inclination to be obscure. But the typical Bowers' faults are still there in spades. Basically it comes down to this: even when you can crawl into his viewpoint you too frequently can't understand what he's talking about; you would have to be him, or be one of the one or two or four other people who encountered the incident which Bill is making an esoteric reference to.

Locke's Rules For Esotericism. Best: It gets caught by the person/people it was aimed at, and no one else is even aware that an esoteric statement was made. Second Best: It hits the target it was aimed at, and is amusing enough to be



...being notes for a speech delivered at Confusion 11, Friday, January 29, 1982

It is vaguely reassuring that at least a few things in life remain constant.

...while skimming over what I had to say last year, I came across this--in the third paragraph:

"...here it is, a week and a half before the convention. ...and, as usual, . nothing has been committed to paper."

Pause.

A look at the calender.

...ah well.

...and having maintained that tradition, let's depart from others...at least in the conception stage: This will not be labelled a "fanzine", "editorial", or whatever; neither will it be a confessional or a recanting of employment and financial woes; and if you want to find out the latest thrilling chapters in my sex life...well, Denise's *Greywalkin* and Leah's *Imp*<sup>1</sup> contain enough explicitness for even the most vicarious of you.

...well, enough for everyone but my friends.

Some things remain--the format of determined non-sequentiality, for example--and there will undoubtedly be an occasional touch of esoterica (just to see who's awake out there). The ellipses you'll have to insert on your own; the awkward pauses as I reach for a drink or a cigarette are carefully choergraphed; and the end result will not be the most thrilling moment of your (or, hopefully, my) Confusion this year.

...what it will be is the closest thing to a "real speech" that I've attempted in years.

Let's hit it...

Bill Bowers' "IF YOU DON'T PUT THAT SWORD AWAY, FUCKER... I'LL RUN YOU THROUGH!"

Now that I have your attention...

"Guns don't kill people. People carrying guns kill people."

I apologize for not being able to recall the source to which to attribute that particular quasi-quote to. It is what is known in the trade (and Haldeman Kentucky) as a knee-jerker.

As such, it has some validity--if not total accuracy.

A matter of taste:

I am not a vegetarian. I eat meat, and I have no quarell with sports hunters. I find other ways preferable to "prove my manhood", but then I've always better at utilizing my mouth that I have been with long objects emitting projectiles.<sup>2</sup> The sensation of spearing someone (or something) verbally is just as satisfactory as any other method--and the potential side-effects are just possibly not quite as consequential.

And you can both have your cake...and eat it, too.

A position of personal Philosophy:

I am an erstaz involvist--even in the causes I believe most passionately.

Still, while I don't know the solution--even to the extent of suggesting a possible (let alone a satisfactory) one--I am less than thrilled with the mere existence of hand-guns.

<sup>1</sup> Leah's fanzine never made it out. Eventually I ran the piece in an apazine...and it will probably end up here or elsewhere...unless she does something R.S.N.!

<sup>2</sup> ...at this point, while listening to a tape of the speech, one can distinctly hear Glicksohn's voice proclaiming from the audience: "At last! A major breakthrough." I'd ask him to explain that...but if I did, he just might!

I can only visualize them as the ultimate in mechanical masturbation: a short burst of relief, inexpertly (no matter how skillfully) delivered by the hands of someone who's only recourse when irked is not idiosyncratic fanzine articles (or self-serving convention speeches)--but rather the climatic stroking of a hair trigger.

It all depends on what you consider fannish--and who you select as the arbitrator in determining the canon of standards.

Me?

Well, I've always been rather fond of Buck Coulson.

After all, he is twenty-plus years responsible for me becoming hooked on fandom.

We all have our crosses to bear, our shrouds to imprint...and our Sundays to re-emerge from the tomb-like environs of a convention hotel...

...where at least one of us may have been crucified Friday evening.

No, it's not because of the valuable ones we lost--Lennon and Sadat. Nor is because of the less valuable ones--Reagan and the Pope--that we didn't lose. Thank God ... yours/mine/theirs ... wherever she might be.

God, it is a given, has to be female.

There is no other rationalization for the capriciousness of fate.

...and that is an inane rationalization.

And yet, in other forums, people have been gunned down for uttering lesser inanities.

We all say silly things. Some of us specialize to the point of making an art-form out of sticking our foot-in-mouth. The fact that I have raised the level of performance to new highs has nothing to do with physical stature: it is simply that I am an elitest--a topic to which I will return shortly.

When you care enough to send the Very Best...

...make sure that it is of a caliber capable of rendering the recipient incoherent...

...but never incapacitated.

Of course it's personal.

The following did not form the philosophy; nor did it quick-freeze the anti-handgun aversion into total immutability.

It's just an anecdote, you know.

...you know...anecdotes: the ones you live through to tell others. Later.

A number of my friends own handguns.

They are experts in the care and feeding--and firing--of the fist-full of manhood. So I am told; I have no reason to believe otherwise: my friends never lie to me... except when it's for my own good.

This:

A number of years ago--and a friend who was as emotionally fucked-up as I've been known to be.

A friend who is now an acquaintance--primarily because of one momentary action. Action can be verbalized, fantasized...or enacted.

We had handguns; he knew handguns.

We had killed several fifths, in incredibly short timespans, of Bacardi's 151 dark between us, over the preceding year. He from time to time drove me up the wall, but that is a talent only my best friends possess. We jabbed back and forth, but I cared for him...and I thought he cared for me...

One night. Late. Several of us. His apartment.

Those of us who drank, had done so.

Those of us who smoked...had done a few bowls.

He...who patronized both forms of alternate entertainment...had (to the best of my recollection) not over-indulged in either.

Later, kibbitzing, innanities and slandercon completed, he brought forth his collection of weaponry.

Projectile orientated.

Hand-held.

I, as is my wont, said...

...something;

...whether what I said was, a) witty; b) insightful; or c) unintelligible--is dependent on your perspective...and where you were that particular night in fannish history.

He reacted, in apparently good spirits.

He is not, was not an evil person...nor an unlikable person. In many contexts--more than many fans--he was a "good" person.

But then he pointed one of the fistfulls of penis caricatures at me...

...and pulled the trigger.

I heard the click.

I saw the barrel...the infinity of it...

...and I died.

He knew that the gun was unloaded.

I knew that the gun was unloaded; I trusted him.

And I undoubtedly had agitated him; sometimes I do that with my mere presence.

Without saying a word.

Though I usually do say a word: if not three.

In retrospective...I probably had asked for a response...

...but some responses are totally unacceptable.

I told him that, if he ever did that again, I would take his prized brass-gleaming object-de'-manhood...stuff it down his throat to such an extent that the butt stuck out his asshole...and, having made sure that it was loaded with something other than superlatives...give the trigger a squeeze for the old gipper.

For it was, after all, only the merest freeze-frame in the fictionalized script of life and legend.

Even though, in this tv-movie--I tell only the truth.

I have seen the end--my own personal end (the only one that counts) in dreams uncounted.

I am still less than thrilled with the concept of dying...but I've come a long way from the time when, after I'd fallen into a four-foot deep pool on an obstacle course, I literally dug under two men who were bigger than I.

The first time I had a major asthma attack and I hyper-ventilated, I knew it was all over.

I have laid on my back, on an asphalt road east of Chicago, and gazed up into the universe as the meteorites descended.

...but I have never seen anything bigger, nor experienced anything more frightening, more indictive of sheer terror, than I did...when that vaster-than-empires gun barrel loomed black-holishly less than a meter from my face.

Ah, well...one can't dwell endlessly on the impetuous act of a gun-handler.

I will say this.

I meant what I said to him.

...and, had I had a handgun--loaded--within reach, I probably would have used it that night.

...and that is what frightens me most about the whole episode.

Elitism and the particular impetus for the subject matter of this extended (even if after-the-title) prolog:

I'm going to shortly mention a specific magazine.

Boos and hisses will automatically erupt: you are pre-conditioned, and you cannot help it; you will not want to:

I purchase and read...\*gasp\*...*Starlog*...

(pause)

...and in the latest issue (#55) I discovered the following letter, quoted in, and leading off the editorial... An editorial titled "Symbols of Violence!!!" (yes, complete with three, count 'em, exclamation points!!!)

"I am alarmed by the increasing violence in fandom. Conventions have ceased being fun for me and are now actively frightening. Fans wear guns, uniforms and weapons, and I have been threatened with blasters, swords and verbal descriptions of violence. At a recent con, somebody set off a real flamethrower in the audience of a masquerade, and one fan started a small fire when he ignited a flare in the Parking lot."

The writer continues:

"I shuddered through parts of RAIDERS, and I fear Lucas will make ripping faces, bloody propellers and burning snakes a part of STAR WARS. I do not want SF as a retreat from reality, but neither do I want it to be endured instead of happy vacations from everyday life. I do not want to get used to gore and fear. I run from the violence that will coarsen my soul."

signed: *Sylvia Stevens*

I found the editorial response to be both evasive...and surprisingly naive, but it is not my intention to reply directly to that...nor to attempt answering the letter writer myself. It must be a given in that Sylvia Stevens wrote to *Starlog*--and Kerry O'Quinn publishes the same--that the subject matter raised can be of only academic interest to us.

After all, nothing of the sort could possibly happen within the continuum of a science fiction convention.

Still, it does serve as a convenient springboard to discuss a few things that have been bothering me--at science fiction conventions--for some time now.

In 1975, responding to a locwriter in *Outworlds* #25, I wrote:

"The Dorsai, in this case, are a quasimilitary group of fans who have been playing at being door guards at some midwestern cons for about a year now. ...in what can only be described as stormtrooper uniforms. I don't know any of them by name (I wonder if they have numbers?), and I'm sure they do what they do for the most honorable of reasons, but their training and capability in preventing rip-offs is suspect from what I hear. I must admit in all honesty that the entire idea of uniformed, role-playing fans (certainly we all play roles, and wear "uniforms", but you know what I mean...) grates on me. I spent 3 years, 9 months, 4 days, wearing a uniform in no-good-cause, and while I can rationalize the necessity for them from cops to nurses, anything resembling a military uniform produces a physical repulsion in me. Give me back the rent-a-cops; at least THEY had a reason to glare at every fan as if he were a potential thief..."

Long ago, and faraway...: In fandom all of the passionate concerns of the moment--be it the size of conventions, the point-of-origin of new influxes of attendees, or whether the Best Fanzine Hugo has any function other than as a paperweight for Dick Geis--all of these seem to pass with time.

Some scars, yes, are left, and some wounds are slower to heal than others... but, by and large, we all emerge co-existing. And some times we even resume speaking to each other.

...rather than at each other.

...as time went on, and I encountered new people, I was surprised to discover that a number of them were active members of the fan-Dorsai. I was intrigued to find out that they rarely grunted, and that relatively few of them maimed children as a form of fanac.

Some of them have proven to be valuable friends...but in every case, the initial encounters took place when they were in civies...and out of the role.

As I progress through life I grow increasingly more tolerant of certain aspects of social interaction...and considerably less tolerant of others--but one has remained constant:

I deny no one the right to wear a military-style uniform at conventions.

But if you do so, please give me a little space.

In other words, don't stand directly in front of me.

You see, the mere sight of such things *still* produces a gagging sensation in me... followed by an almost uncontrollable urge to puke.

You might end up with a rather messy uniform.

...which wouldn't be so bad except that some of the offal might splash back on my caftan...

...and I'd be left with a foul taste in my mouth for quite some time.

I dislike having a foul taste in my mouth: other than the finely honed skill of firmly inserting my foot up to the hilt ...err, the ankle... I am generally quite choosy in the ways I indulge my oral gratifications.

I dislike concentrating on negative reactions to fans, or fan activities at cons. Not everything is as I would have it, either, but I have been subjected to much too much bitching and griping about how some don't enjoy conventions as much as they used to...because conventions aren't as much fun as they used to be...

...primarily because this or that group, performing this or that activity, is not consistent with trufannishness.

Trufannishness, it is a given, is what I point at when I define it...but that doesn't alleviate the fact that things have changed over the past twenty years...and will continue to change.

Overall, I find conventions more fun than ever--but that may well be because of a considerable change in personal priorities combined with a lessening need to "prove" anything to anyone (including myself): the simple enjoyment of being with one's friends, discovering new friends...and tweaking a few noses (if not presumptions) in the process, provides me with enough satisfaction so that the inevitable nuisances of hotel elevators, con committees, and the occasional total asshole are tolerable...if not easily dismissable.

...and besides, it's generally a lot easier to dissect the convention, and the problems with it, on the way home--with whomever I'm riding with--and then leave it there...

Doing something about the irritants usually involves work...

...but, since I had to write something for tonight, anyway:

Even though I have formed my own self-serving guide to survival at a science fiction convention...it does not mean that I am totally unobservant in my constant search for personal enjoyment. Despite my carefully honed mantle of protectivity, I can still be irritated...and occasionally more...by the actions of others. Even when the actions are not directed at me.

I am convinced, having attended 42 conventions over the past three years alone (and having read of, or heard about as many others), that it is inevitable, sooner more probably than later, that we're going to have to deal with something we'd all find it more convenient simply not to think about.

And that is this:

A fan being seriously injured or maimed, if not killed, by another fan...

...a role-playing fan:

...a fan with a weapon.

I am frightened.

...and totally unsure of what to do about it.

But I've got to try, and all of this is it:

Please note that this possibility is not just a bad dream, nor a worse-case scenerio. All of the individual components necessary for its realization--

- an escapist environment;
- weapons, plastic and real, mixed indiscriminately, and banished openly;
- ample supplies of alcohol and other forms of Alternate Entertainment available;
- a remarkable tolerance of determinedly eccentric modes of behaviour & dress;
- all in the hands of adolescents (of varying chronological ages) --
- are present at every convention you'll attend.

Simplifications? Yes, of course.

But I have only so much time... and you have only so much patience. Even if you happen to agree with me.

(pause)

Just because conventions run by present or former members of the Columbus Calvery seem to have some difficulty staying in their proper month... doesn't mean they aren't trying.

Just because a woman sleeps with more than one person doesn't mean that she's a whore... ..or that she'll sleep with you.

Just because an author depicts a certain society in a work of fiction... doesn't necessarily mean that he intends or wants... that you should live it, be it.

Just because you identify strongly with a fictional world or characterization does not mean that you are a less worthy person than I. (...nor more worthy.)

And just because I raise touchy subjects and make provocative statements in public forums, it does not mean that I'm going to be willing to sit down and talk with you about either immediately after descending that step...

If you agree, or not...either way...think about it, and write me a letter -- after the convention.

After all, if I had the answers to the quiz with me, you'd be hearing them. I must have left the textbook at home.

Peace-bonding. Now there's a nice solution.

But there are a lot of nice, idealistic solutions to a lot of things: Peace with Honor, supply-side economics, Universal Brotherhood, the Faan Awards...

I know. I have a bagful of idealistic solutions to my own problems, financial and emotional.

Sometimes they even work.

Strangely enough, I am not an avowed pacifist.

Conflict is not only necessary, it is essential to the human condition.

It is the manner in which the conflict is executed that we have to agree to disagree.

I have a total aversion to role-playing board games. (That is probably because I've never been too good at strategy...or at plotting speeches.) I say that because too many of my friends have been sucked into these fantasy worlds never to be seen again...though I occasionally encounter the shell of their bodies.

(However, I thoroughly approve of poker playing at conventions, if only because it takes mainly males out of circulation.)

As to role-playing at conventions...well, there...here...I have a bit more sympathy.

...obviously, since I also assume a role while up here;

...sometimes, even when down there.

And who is to say whose role is more right?

Modestly, I have to find my type of role playing preferable--both aesthetically and quantitatively (in terms of decibel levels emitted) to those roles requiring weaponry other than verbal repartee--but I must admit there is room for disagreement.

Not much room...but some.

As to the costuming aspect of role-playing--well, if chose to encase your body in a fatigue shell--or yards of wookiee-fur--and sweat your way through a convention ...that too is acceptable.

Down wind, if you please.

It's ironic that I raise this topic at the same convention where, only a couple of years ago, Spider Robinson depicted a list of Whacky Weapons.

I enjoyed that.

I also enjoy seeing what Tullio will come up with in the way of pulsating toys. (I think I enjoyed the latest one best: you know, the one that, when fired, sounds

remarkably like a moo-oo-ing cow. Udderly nonsense. (I know, but...)  
 And a lot of the novels I've enjoyed most detail war, death, and weaponry galore.  
 ...as well as the ones I can't say that I "enjoyed"--but did identify with.  
 ...and, yes, I'll go see the movie CONAN when it comes out.  
 ...as well as, next year, the third STAR WARS movie--no matter how many people are  
 blown away (or unhanded) in the name of special effects.  
 But that's business, you see. The company I work for has a license to RAIDERS  
 and the STAR WARS series.  
 We build toys for the future generations of America.  
 ...including play-sets with guns that click convincingly...and blow-up on demand.  
 It's the most fun job I've ever had.  
 I never said I was logical.  
 ...only opinionated.

...but I can't help wishing that those who are equally opinionated pro- quote "the  
 right to bear arms" unquote might have had the thrill of manifesting pallets stacked  
 high with maimed corpses sealed in giant baggies--the coffins ran out early in the Tet  
 Offensive--and then to wander over to the base snack bar, only to encounter a baby-  
 faced 19-year-old American:

He was in uniform.  
 ...complete with a string of human ears hanging from his belt.  
 And as he sipped a Coke, he could only talk about going back.  
 To waste more goods.

...sort of like, mellowed out at the dead dog party, talking about the next  
 convention down the line.

I can't help but wonder if you--  
 --those of you who have to strap on a blaster or a sword to complete your persona  
 at a science fiction convention (alien territory, yes, but hardly inherently dangerous)--  
 I wonder if it would make any difference if you had ever seen a slain human  
 being--

--no, not a dead distant relative, a testament of the mortician's art, wax-like  
 on display for The Loved Ones--

--a dirt-encrusted body, the face frozen in eternal grimace, congealed blood  
 everywhere: someone who had been alive but was no longer...never again:

--murdered (no matter what the cause, no matter by which "side") -- his body  
 penetrated--messily--by a weapon.

I'm the eternal optimist.

Maybe, had you seen what I saw almost fifteen years ago... just maybe it would  
 alter your mode of self-expression at conventions.

...or maybe not.  
 I guess you had to be there.  
 ...but I'm glad you weren't.

I wasn't "in" the "quote" war.

I was a safe 800 miles off the Viet Nam coast--keypunching ammunition one way;  
 keypunching bodies the other way--and the only wounds I suffered were as the result  
 of dedicated bar-hopping down in Angeles City...

--but I saw enough to validate my credentials to raise this topic, here.

...and now, just now, you are possibly beginning to see why I play my role the  
 way I do:

No expert--still very much the adolescent amateur--I prefer making love to the  
 alternative.

...and I prefer writing about it, speaking about it--esoterically hinting at my  
 successes while analyzing my failures, tweaking your curiosity of the "who's" while  
 hopefully retaining your attention for the "what's" I find important.

It's a lot more fun than this has been...I don't have to add.

Making love is an affirmation of life.

Weaponery, by inherent design, is a denial of sight and limb...  
...and all too often a denial of life itself.

One moment more...please?

Listen...I'm not telling anyone here how they have to dress or act, at a science fiction convention:

I know only too well how negatively I react when even the best-intentioned tell me I "have" to do something. Even if it's for my own good.

This is what I want to say:

I think we have a very serious problem, at some conventions, with role-playing fans carrying potentially injurious weaponery.

What should we do about it?

I don't know...but I think it's something more convention committees are going to have to address themselves to...and then enforce (diplomatically) their decisions.

As for me... Well, I won't avoid going to a convention simply because it does not have a weapons policy...but it will prove a determining factor in cases where I am otherwise undecided.

...for those of you who do not know me, for those of you who disagree with me: not to worry.

Even if I were to launch a Holy Crusade, and even though I am incredibly important in certain circles of Incredibly Decadent Midwestern Fandom... I am not in any position to enforce my edicts.

You have an input, if you wish: Talk to the convention committees.

With one exception:

I am 50% of the committee of one convention.

...in three years we haven't had any problems (our clientele seems to be pre-occupied with other things) and I don't foresee any arising, but, for reference, anyone showing up at Spacecon with weaponery will be asked to leave same in their room.

Failing that, they will be invited to leave.

Politely. But firmly.

Somehow I don't think I'll have too much trouble getting this passed at the next committee meeting.

Rusty?

I like being able to see.

You...all of you. But, in particular...

I like having the unimpaired usage of all the extremenities of my body.

...and I like being alive--now, more than ever before.

The odds against my continued enjoyment of all those things are much, much too high in the Real World: I really don't need the deck stacked against me here: ...here, with my family and friends. ...and friends yet to be made.

Like, just possibly--after we all cool down--just possibly you.

Stranger things have happened at science fiction conventions.

The Last Page:

You know, I'm incredibly lucky:

I am thirty-eight & one half years old--and I have only lost one that I cared for to death.

That was Susan, of course...and even though we hadn't seen much of each other for years...the hurt still aches. The fact that she is gone is unjust: the only consolation is that it was done by no man's hand...rather, ordained by whatever the force is that mandates our natural longevity in this place and time.

Life goes on.

...and sooner, or later, in each of our cases it won't.

My friends are very, very important to me.

I hurt them enough, with unthinking words, actions and deeds.  
I really don't need your help...  
...or the aid of your weapons.  
Should you injure, or maim one of my friends--even accidentally--you will discover why I disclaimed pacifism.  
That is neither threat, promise...nor speech-making bravado.  
That's the way it is.

The battle is over...; let me propose a truce:

You've all heard the homily "Let's put science fiction back in the gutter, where it belongs!"

But unless you're a southern Michigan fan from a fannish decade ago, you may not have heard the one that follows this:

Conventions are created to have fun.

So...let's go back to the days when it was sufficient reason to go to one to "...get drunk, high...or laid."

...and, if you swim...the pool's over that way.

I don't...so I think I'll have that drink now.

This, and the surrounding material by that Uncle Albert role-playing character, is collectively known as:

Friday Nite Live!

Let's keep it that way.

---Bill Bowers (1/28/82 : 12:35 am)

Cheerful stuff...what say?

It was pointed out to me afterwards that none of the people it was directed at were in the audience: they were there...but they were out in the lobby and hallways parading. I suppose the same would hold true no matter where it was published, also... which is slightly discouraging. But at least I feel better now.

How about you?

a letter from JOEL ZAKEM:

I feel a bit guilty about this letter.

As much as I have enjoyed your writing in *Xenolith* (and other fan publications), I have only written you once. And this letter is not prompted by my enjoyment of the latest issues, but by a (probably minor) remark in X-19 that I found disturbing.

That remark, in parenthesis on pg. 277, said, "as I wait to see what that maniac Begin will do now, as the repercussions of the Sadat assassination remain unclear."

I am not one to defend (or even agree with) some of Begin's policies, but the wording and tone of that statement bothered me. Maybe because it was unexpected, since international politics are rarely discussed in the few fanzines I read, it bothered me.

It almost seemed to me that you were trying to make a connection between Begin and the assassination, which I feel is erroneous as well as unfair. You also seem to be putting the blame on Begin (and Isreal) for any future trouble in the Middle East.

Without getting into a long and involved discussion on the history and politics of that area, I feel that most of the blame for the troubles result from the policies of countries other than Egypt and Israel.

Whether Begin is or isn't a "maniac" is a matter of opinion, and I would be the last one to try and stifle your opinions and feelings. One reason that I enjoy your writing is that you strive to be totally honest. I only feel that some things require much more thought than you seem to have put into that statement.

I also feel that I have gone into a minor part of the latest double issue of *Xenolith* much more than it deserves. I just find it easier to blow off steam than to compliment you on another enjoyable publication. I should try to change my ways.

Err...Joel: The "wording and tone" of the statement were intentional; the "connection" you see was not. (It was simply a comment on Begin's patented gift for taking full advantage of turmoil elsewhere to do his thing while Uncle Sam's limited attention span is diverted.)

I dunno...I'm generally getting at least one (often two) of the three major newsweeklies, and I read more than the comics in the Enquirer every day (except when at conventions; there are limits to the pursuit of knowledge, after all). Working the schedule I do now, I rarely get home until after the evening network newscasts are over...but when I can I watch one of them.

I always have. There's no way to assimilate even a noticable percentage of what's happenin'...but that's no excuse for not being as well informed as we can. A lot of us may not deal too well with that world Out There...but it's there, it ain't going away (except when we're lost in a book)...and it's going to deal with us one day.

As to my feelings toward Begin...selfishly, in terms of my own continued existence on this planet, I consider him far and away the most "dangerous" "world leader" (an interesting term, that) holding power today. As far as I can see, his only overall policy is one of genocide.

That seems rather strange, all things considered.

Besides that, everytime I've seen the guy on tv, he has given me the creeps.

(...and you will carefully note that I have mentioned no race, creed, or nation.)

a letter from "AIA": .....

You know, Bill, that if you keep telling me how wonderful my locs are, I'll start trying to make them marvelously witty on purpose and they'll turn out as dull as a Lin Carter novel. But that's OK, keep praising me; I'll take the risk. And thanks. I need the encouragement sometimes.

So what's wrong, I should ask Ted White, with you being your favorite subject? I'd say the same is true of everyone (er, We are our favorite subject, not you are our favorite subject; though the latter may be true in some cases for all I know.) Other people are just less direct about it, that's all.

"Our Very Own Venus Fly Trap"? Has Frank forgiven you for that one? By the way, when he handed me his change-of-address notice he commented, "If I were Bill Bowers this would be the next issue of *Xenolith*." So I'm going to send him a loc on it.

My own guess as to the meaning of F.H.F. turned out to be correct, after all (Lan stole his guess from me, but he can keep the prize). How embarrassing.

I don't know how tender my fannish years are ; I think I was a fan long before I knew other fans existed. With some people it's just natural.

The final bid at Conclave was a ride home. Even Lan's offer of half his book collection couldn't top that! Fortunately, I never actually went up for auction.

Maybe Mike Bracken has expressed an inadvertent truth about fandom: "You can check out anytime you like, but you can never leave." Frightening, isn't it? I get a little tired of my usual fannish routine now and then, but that never really lasts too long. And I don't interpret it as meaning there's something wrong with fandom, the way I've seen all too many people do. I wonder about the Favorite Fannish Pastime of writing scathing condemnations of fandom. I think it says a lot more about the writers than it does about fandom. (I Realize that Mike's comments were far from scathing, but I've seen quite a bit of invective on the subject in recent fanzines. Is it the change in the weather, or what?)

If Michelle and I formed a women's auxiliary of F.H.F., would it be because we were failed wives or because the erstwhile partners were failed? (I know how I would answer that, but never mind.) I prefer to think that, rather than having failed, we have transcended our former wedded state. So there. Anyway, what privileges (and dufies) would we have as members of the auxiliary? And to whom?

Mike is very serious about getting the Best Fanzine award for *Energumen*; at Spacecon he offered to buy my vote. Any price. I was considering insisting he tell me what F.H.F. stood for, but now that's unnecessary. Any other suggestions?

As for Mike Wallis' loc ...well, he once spelled *Xenolith* with a Z.



...then there was Dave Jennerete, and that very strange "fanzine", but<sup>other</sup> than that the organization rarely registered notable amounts of time in my everyday thoughts.

Last year I discovered a co-worker who not only read, but read science fiction. (You have to understand that this is rather rare in my work experience.) Despite the fact she was associating with a rather unsavory character (one made esoterically famous in Steve Leigh's *Energumen* article), I liked her.

She was in Mensa. She, once she found how how "important" I was (I didn't tell her; believe me!), wanted me to address the local group.

I begged off...muttering negative thoughts about elitest groups.

Until a friend of my co-worker's needed a ride to a Monthly Gathering...

...strictly out of the kindness of my heart, you understand.

Anyway, for one reason or another (I'm sure you'll find out their names if you ask the right people), I've ended up going to several Mensa functions over the past few months...even skipping CFG meetings in the process. I've had fun, even while confirming that the intellectual upper crust is just as emotionally fucked-up as we sci-fiers...and practice even more juvenile forms of humor.

I still wasn't going to do anything about the situation, until two of the women made a blanket statement that they would not go to bed with anyone who was not in Mensa.

This, in at least one case, made it personal.

And of such vast leaps of logic are 3 hour tests taken on a Saturday morning.

Ah, well... I came close (couldn't come any closer!)

...close enough to still be a groupie!

(...and the reason I don't mention the co-workers name...is that I did in an apazine; and got asked when I'd dropped my policy on naming names. So I'm reinstating it... Sorry, Naomi...you'll have to get your egoboo elsewhere...!)

a letter from MIMI GLICKSONN: .....

There is probably nothing unusual about this latest attempt at a fanzine from you except that three of the five people in our car on the way back from Octocon kept exhaustion at bay by reading it. (Two of them promptly fell asleep which says something about *Xenolith* or Octocon, take your choice.) A fourth passenger was read one particular crossed-over line and decided that there were more reasons to be annoyed at you than just being excluded from your mailing list and the fifth person was driving so it was just as well he wasn't reading X too. I thot I'd dash off a few comments before I sobered up from the con and realized how futile it all is...

Your phlegmatic acceptance of Ted's denunciation of your article in NERG pleased me. I didn't agree with his trashing of you--of course; I wouldn't have published your piece otherwise even though you are one of the two or three best friends I have. --but I wasn't sure how you'd react. Your turning it into another "aspect" of your fan career reminds me of the way I once took a deliberately insulting reference to myself as a "Boy Wonder of Canadian fandom" and parlayed it into a two or three year fannish schtick. This strikes me as the only way to look at such well-intentioned if inaccurate thinking: being upset serves no purpose whatsoever and after several decades of co-existence in fandom you and Ted aren't likely to suddenly be able to start thinking/acting/fanning along similar lines. So turning it into another routine accepts it without undue rancour and even helps keep things in perspective in a typically fannish way. ("One fan's ego is another fan's fanarticle" sort of thing.) I'm also glad that you've received some positive feedback on the piece: as I intimated in my opening comments in NERG itself, I knew myself that it was a hard piece for a casual reader to get into but there were many reasons for publishing it despite that. I liked it, and that was justification enough for using it. That others also appreciated the effort behind it is merely icing on the cake. (And how much of any of this will mean anything to anyone who hasn't seen both NERG 16 and Pong 24? A grand total of maybe six people on the *Xenolith* mailing list? Isn't esoterica wonderful??)

